

T³: Trustee Training Tips

Number 6 Volume 4 *Kentucky Department for Libraries & Archives* Winter 2005

NEW YEAR BRINGS NEW OPPORTUNITIES

Mark your calendars. On Tuesday, January 3rd, the Kentucky General Assembly convenes in Frankfort. Among the many issues that will come before them is a new biennial budget—and all library trustees and users want to see more funding for their local libraries. A group working to help make that happen is the Kentucky Public Library Association's (a division of the Kentucky Library Association) Legislative Committee. This group monitors not only budgetary information, but other legislation—both positive and negative for libraries—and reports to the library community through a variety of means.

One way trustees can stay in touch with late-breaking news is to ask their library director to keep them informed. One way trustees can discuss among themselves what pending legislation may, or may not, mean for libraries is through the new electronic discussion list just for Kentucky public library trustees. If you have not subscribed and wish to do so, simply send an email to wonkst@kenton.lib.ky.us and put the word “subscribe” in the subject line.

The recognized job description for a library board member includes advocating for the library. Advocacy can take many forms, but the one most likely to come to mind first is the legislative one. Now is your chance to perform that part of your job description. Speak up for all our libraries as you speak up for your own. Get to know your legislators and let them hear from you consistently. If you need assistance in how to do this, ask your library director for tips from the KPLA Legislative Committee.

Another way to speak up publicly is to write a letter to the editor of your local newspaper extolling the community benefits of a public library. Again, your director can supply you with up-to-date statistical information about your library's performance over the past year or month or whatever time frame you choose. Tell about the good things the library is doing, talk about how much more it could do, speak to the value of libraries in general to society, democracy, and economic development. There are so many, many good quotations to use about the library's role in protecting “truth, justice, and the American way.” Use them to add spice and poignancy to your letters.

Last, but not least, never underestimate the power of simply speaking to neighbors and friends about how great your library is. You never know whose ear finally hears your words.

THE IMPORTANCE OF POLICY

Past issues of *T3: Trustee Training Tips* have repeatedly discussed the importance of every library board having its board policies codified and readily available. (Every member of the board, as well as the director, should have a copy.) Digging through old meeting minutes to find individual policies or resolutions can become quite time consuming and still no one is confident this is the latest and most up-to-date decision of record. Likewise, consulting the Kentucky Revised Statutes or Kentucky Administrative Regulations to see if they limit what a library board may do is tedious and fraught with potential error.

To be usable and effective, these policies must be organized in a way that allows trustees to use them easily. Anything less is a big risk for the board and its members, as well as the library they serve. Here are some examples of typical board problems resulting from poorly written or no board policies:

☛ A board member has a very long talk with the board's attorney, without authorization from the board as a whole, and the attorney sends the library a very large bill for his time. Board policy should define who may speak to professional consultants on behalf of the board and the process for that authorization.

☛ The director resigns and the board discovers serious discrepancies between what they thought was an accurate picture of the financial strength of the library and the reality. The board has not commissioned the required professional audit during the appropriate time frame. Although there is a statute requiring the audit, board policy needs to define the process for hiring the auditor.

☛ The board sends one of its members to the American Library Association conference in New Orleans in June. The trustee submits vouchers for transportation, lodging, and several hundred dollars for "meals and miscellaneous" expenses. Board policy may state that members shall be reimbursed for out-of-pocket expenses, but it also needs to define the limits of expenses for reimbursement. And it should also require documentation for appropriate claims.

☛ Angry citizens show up *en masse* for a board meeting and demand to talk to the board. Chaos erupts when some trustees want to allow unlimited time for the complaints and others object to allowing outsiders any time on the agenda. A policy covering what will be allowed and what will not be allowed should be in place. [Remember, library boards are subject to the Open Meetings Act, so it would be wise to determine what authority the library board has in setting policy for public attendance and participation.)

The above are a very few examples of how inadequate or nonexistent board policies can cause many hours and much expense to resolve. Still, even having the perfect board policy manual in place is no guarantee trustees will follow their own policies. But a board in-service with your attorney about the gravity of not following written board policies should solve that problem quickly.

--adapted from Nonprofit Board Leader
August 2005
Cain Consulting Group

PROMOTING YOUR LIBRARY

Everyone in the library community—staff, trustees, faithful customers—understands the importance of their local public library. Getting that message across competently and correctly is an essential and sometimes difficult role. Here are some tips to help you promote your library effectively.

In order to be effective advocates, trustees must:

- Be well versed on all aspects of library service and library funding;
- Understand the local power structure;
- Accept accountability for the public funds your library receives;
- Hone listening skills to hear what officials are really saying;
- Align library services with the personal agendas of elected officials and community needs;
- Avoid appearing political;
- Discuss the library in business terms, such as “return on investment;”
- Shift focus from “nice-to-have” to “necessity” and from “cost” to “benefit;”
- Talk about issues other than money by communicating good news often;
- Keep elected officials “in the loop,” as their experience, knowledge and skills can be the library’s greatest assets;
- Avoid library jargon and complicated statistics;
- Personalize the library experience by collecting the retelling patron stories.

Trustees can educate elected officials about:

- ♦ The value of investing in library services;
- ♦ The relationship between academic achievement and library services;
- ♦ How libraries contribute to economic development;
- ♦ How much their communities love their libraries!

Research tells us elected officials and decisions makers often don’t know that they don’t know. These people already have their hands full, and, when it comes time to make an important library decision, they are often hampered by limited knowledge, dated perceptions, and downright misperceptions.

Discussions with elected officials frequently reveal that many:

- Haven’t been in a library since leaving school;
- Don’t fully understand what libraries do and for whom;
- Underestimate the importance the public attaches to libraries;
- Understand snow removal and trash collection better than library services;
- Resist any decision that raises taxes;
- Believe the Internet make the library obsolete;
- Don’t focus on libraries because they never hear a complaint.

T³:Trustee Training Tips is published quarterly by the Field Services Division of the Kentucky Department for Libraries and Archives. Correspondence should be addressed to the editor, Nelda Moore, at Lincoln Trail Regional Office, 201 West Dixie Avenue, Suite One, Elizabethtown 42701-1533. Phone 270.766.5222; Fax 270.766.5273; e-mail: nelda.moore@ky.gov.

Serving Kentucky’s Need to Know



An agency of the Education Cabinet

LIBRARY LETTERS

*Dear Marian Librarian,
We've developed a Library Board Policy Manual.
Does it follow the dates of our Long Range Plan
and need to be revised at the end of the plan?*

-- Troubled Trustee

Dear Troubled,

Your question brings two issues forward. First of all, you appear to have confused the purposes of the library's Long Range Plan and the board's Policy Manual. They are exclusive documents with very different purposes. You need both, but you do not need to consider them together. As to the frequency of revision for your Board Policy Manual, that is an on-going effort. Every time you add, delete, or change a policy, it needs to be added, deleted, or changed in the Policy Manual, with the date of the change noted. Even policies that don't have changes driving them need to be reviewed, a few each month, to make sure they are accurately reflecting the board's actions.

DID YOU KNOW?

The Kentucky Library Trustee Association is sponsoring a scholarship/grant for one trustee member to attend the 2006 American Library Association Conference in New Orleans in late June. This is the first time KLTA has sponsored such a grant, and it makes a wonderful opportunity for a trustee from a small-budgeted library to obtain funds for a relatively expensive conference. This event promises some excellent sessions for additional trustee training from experts across the country.

Enclosed in this edition of *T3: Trustee Training Tips* is an application for the ALA Annual Conference Grant. If you are interested in applying, fill out the application as directed and submit it by the deadline.

The KLTA Board of Directors will evaluate the applications and determine the winner. Good luck to all.

**Kentucky Department for Libraries
and Archives
201 West Dixie Avenue, Suite One
Elizabethtown KY 42701-1533**

